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6 April 1965

NSC review  
completed.

# MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

1. The President called me this morning at about 8:30 a.m. to inquire into the South VietNam situation. He had before him an AP ticker item describing heavy fighting. I briefed him on the heavy fire fight taking place in Binh Dinh Province. The President noted that some 140 VietCong were killed there according to news accounts and he also referred to the loss of four Americans. I explained that the Americans were crewmen in two helicopters shot down about 115 miles southwest of Saigon in Chuong Thien Province and that the fighting in Binh Dinh Province involved a South VietNameese ranger battalion and an armored cavalry squadron engaged with VietCong units. Initial results indicate that the South VietNameese had lost 94 killed and 14 wounded, and that the VietCong had suffered 32 killed, with 100 killed or wounded carried off.

2. The President asked if we had any signs of a buildup in the Pleiku area. I replied that we had noted a buildup in the area around Danang and that there had been a little buildup in areas of Kontum Province. The President said that Secretary McNamara had told him that it appears that two or three North VietNameese Divisions had moved into this vicinity. I explained that we had low-level defector reports of the presence of elements of the North VietNameese 325th Division in the Kontum area but that we cannot confirm this at the moment. I pointed out that MACV has tentatively accepted the presence of a battalion in Kontum and thinks other elements are there also. I said that we had not confirmed this and thus had not added these units to approved order of battle holdings.

3. The President then asked if we had arranged a new program or new initiatives following Ambassador Taylor's recent visit. I told him that we had developed twelve courses of action all of which have been approved for submission to the Ambassador for his approval or changes. I said that these courses involve everything from covert support to certain friendly elements to various types of political and civic actions on an intensified scale.

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4. The President asked me what I thought about developments in VietNam in the past 30 days. I said that developments within the Quat government have improved, morale is up, the South VietNameese military appear to be taking better control of their subordinate units, the dangers of a military coup have been somewhat reduced. I did note, however, that the military situation on the ground has shown no improvement and there is this evidence of buildups which appear ominous and could result in dangers.

5. I said that we saw no indication of a North VietNameese desire to sit down and talk and that I did not foresee any such desire for at least another month or six weeks and until they start to feel pain in the event of damage to their industrial complex.

6. I then offered to send to the President a broader round-up assessing all of these points. The President said he would like to have such a round-up as soon as possible and would like to have the round-up evaluate developments since 1 February, listing total casualties, captured weapons, analysis of the South VietNameese government performance, and anything else related to these. He asked that the analysis be given to Marvin Watson as soon as it is ready.

7. I discussed this requirement immediately with DD/I and AD/CI who set about to arrange for preparation of a memorandum.

/s/

Marshall S. Carter  
Lieutenant General, USA  
Acting Director

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6 April 1965

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## INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

### SITUATION IN VIETNAM

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

Office of Current Intelligence

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Office of Current Intelligence  
6 April 1965

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Situation in Vietnam

The Military Situation in South Vietnam

1. There has been a lull in Viet Cong military activity since mid-March, with fewer incidents reported this year than in the comparable period of 1964. This lull followed a period of intense activity which began with the end of the lunar new year cease-fire on 7 February. Out statistics show, however, that even in this "offensive" phase, there have been fewer incidents this year than last, when there was a similar burst of activity followed by a lull.

2. While the engagements have been fewer in number, they have also been more intense and on a larger scale. During February 1965, government losses in personnel totaled 4,114 (880 killed) and in March 2,715 (644) killed). In 1964, the comparable figures were 1,593 (374 killed) in February and 2,033 (374 killed) in March. Viet Cong casualties in terms of killed and captured in February 1965 were 1,873 and in March 1,916, compared with 1,344 and 1,987 a year ago.

3. From a statistical point of view, the military situation in March appeared more favorable to the government than in February. As noted above, the killed-in-action ratio improved. Total Viet Cong - initiated incidents declined from 1,982 in February to 1,887, with Communist attacks declining from 100 to 78. Comparison of weapons losses during March showed 1,384 lost by the government to 607 captured from the Viet Cong, compared with February figures of 2,376 to 1,384. Captured Viet Cong weapons, however, include only those from combat actions and do not list those recovered from weapons caches following the sinking of two Viet Cong vessels. One of these was a major haul.

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4. Most major engagements during March resulted from government-initiated operations. This is in contrast with February when much of the serious combat stemmed from Viet Cong initiative. The latter, after an unsuccessful Viet Cong two-battalion attack on a Special Forces camp in Binh Ding, were primarily small scale or effective terrorist actions, and main force units showed a tendency to avoid engagement. At the same time, when engaged by the government, the Viet Cong appeared to be grouped in large concentrations and willing to offer stiff resistance.

5. For this reason, the statistics showing a relatively improved government posture in March should be viewed with caution. There are indications that the Viet Cong lull has been the result of regrouping and repositioning, possibly in preparation for a renewed intensification, centered particularly in the northern half of the country.

#### The Viet Cong Build-up in the Northern Provinces

6. It has been evident for some months that a substantial build-up of Viet Cong regular force strength in the five northern most provinces of South Vietnam has been taking place both via covert infiltration and by the redeployment of forces already infiltrated into the area. Regular force Viet Cong strength in this area is now estimated at 16,100 organized into 2 regimental headquarters, 23 battalions, and 77 separate companies.

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7. A sizable portion of the Communist regular military force appears to be concentrated in two areas, near Kontum close to the Laotian border and near Da Nang on the coast. A North Vietnamese [redacted] reported that he was a member of the 2nd battalion of the 101st North Vietnamese Regiment, subordinate to the 325th Division. He also claimed that the other two battalions of the 101st Regiment are present in Kontum Province. We have no separate confirmation of this information.

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[redacted] If, in fact, regular North Vietnamese units are now operating in Kontum, this would be the first instance in which such organizations have been noted in South Vietnam.

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9. The existence of a North Vietnamese regiment in Kontum would give the Communists local numerical superiority and a wider range of offensive capabilities. They would probably be used, for the present, in basically the same manner as regular Viet Cong units are now used, to attack targets of opportunity while avoiding open clashes in situations where heavy US/South Vietnamese firepower and air support could be brought into play. Regular North Vietnamese units have long been used in Laos as stiffeners, keeping for the most part in the background. Hanoi has continued to deny their presence in Laos and can be expected to take the same line in South Vietnam.

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10. Farther to the east, near the vital US air base at Da Nang, there also appears to have been a recent build-up of Viet Cong strength. [redacted]

11. There are also unconfirmed reports [redacted] that elements of the North Vietnamese 325th Division may be in the mountains west of Da Nang as well as in Kontum. Although Da Nang is well protected, the possibility cannot be ruled out that the Viet Cong will attempt to engage the US marines guarding the base in at least a probing action, if not an all-out attack.

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### Communist Actions Since 1 February

12. Communist propaganda continues, on almost a daily basis, to reflect a strong determination to continue and even to increase the level of military action against the US in South Vietnam. This determination was expressed by Hanoi as recently as 4 April --after the crippling strike against the Thanh Hoa Bridge--in a communiqué of the Council of Ministers. The party daily on 2 April predicted that the balance of forces in Vietnam was changing in favor of the Vietnamese people and that eventually the US aggressors will be "completely defeated."

13. In South Vietnam the Liberation Front maintains an even more aggressively determined posture, promising to continue the fighting in South Vietnam for 5, 10, or even 20 years if necessary. On 22 March the Front announced that if the US continued to increase the commitment of its forces to South Vietnam the Front might seek foreign assistance in the forms of military personnel. All three Asian Communist powers responded. Hanoi's Fatherland Front declared that the southerners regrouped to North Vietnam in a part of the Geneva agreements of 1954 were ready to return to the South to fight if the Front called them back. Peiping and Pyongyang also stated that many of their citizens were ready to volunteer to go to South Vietnam when and if the Front called for them.

14. Although Peiping's over-all political and propaganda response to the air strikes has been vitriolic, the Chinese have not committed themselves to any specific countermeasures. A 5 April People's Daily editorial, for example, restated the Chinese position that the struggle of the Vietnamese people is "our struggle," but then asserted in general terms only that the Chinese people "pledge themselves to stand by the 30 million Vietnamese people and to fight together" to the end.

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15. Moreover, there has been no evidence of Chinese Communist troop deployments toward the North Vietnamese border since 1 February.

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Effect of the Air Strikes On North Vietnam

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the air strikes of February and early March had little adverse effect on popular morale in North Vietnam. The DRV populace appears to have taken the early strikes in stride. Hanoi, in fact, seemed as much concerned over the effect of the strikes in disrupting normal economic activity as it did over their effect on morale.

17. Little evidence on the status of morale since the pace of the strikes was stepped up is yet available. However, in recent days, as the US air strikes move closer to Hanoi and attacks are conducted on strategic installations in North Vietnam. DRV propaganda is putting greater emphasis on discrediting US military strength, and is increasing its exaggeration of US losses. This may reflect a desire to sustain public morale under the pressure of US military action.

18. The total military effect of the air strikes has not been great. While a number of individual installations have been destroyed or severely damaged, there is evidence to indicate that the North Vietnamese had previously made arrangements, where possible, to minimize the effect of the raids by dismantlement, evacuation, dispersion, and camouflage. Attacks against North Vietnam's radar defenses, which began on 22 March, have not appreciably affected North Vietnam's early warning capability.

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19. The most effective strikes, from both a military and economic point of view--and even more from the psychological viewpoint--have been the

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latest ones against the Thanh Hoa and Dong Phong Thuong bridges. The destruction of these targets will affect the shipment of goods from the Hanoi-Haiphong area to southern North Vietnam and thence into South Vietnam. Nevertheless, we believe that the North Vietnamese will be able to move adequate supplies to the Viet Cong by alternate routes. Destruction of the bridges has made this more difficult, but they were able to do without the rail line to the south until May 1964, when the Thanh Hoa bridge was reopened for the first time since 1945.

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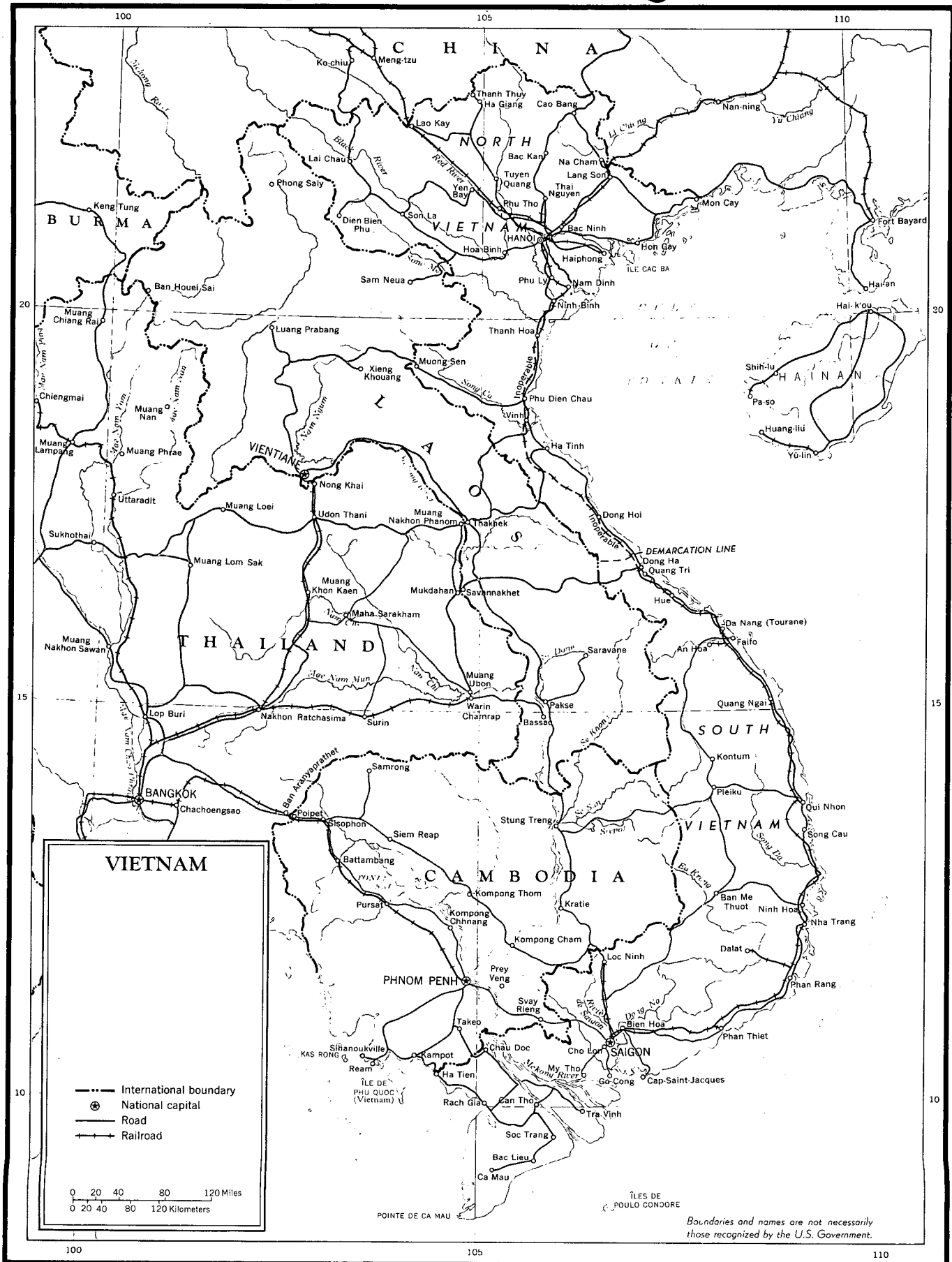
The Political Situation in Saigon

20. On the political side, there is little question that the South Vietnamese Government, the military leadership, and a substantial part of the informed public have received a morale boost from the air strikes on North Vietnam and the employment of US jet aircraft against the Viet Cong in the South. This lift derives in large part from the Vietnamese inference of a deeper and more solid US military and political commitment and an apparent expectation that the war will be accordingly shortened and won. Some Vietnamese are already urging an accompanying diplomatic initiative and claiming to see signs of lowered Viet Cong morale.

21. The improvement in morale, however, could easily be reversed. Continued evidence of Communist determination to resist and of Viet Cong deployment for a renewed intensification of military activity carries a clear danger that the South Vietnamese may rapidly become discouraged over the prospect of an expanded, drawn-out conflict on their territory. This could lead either to interest in a local accommodation with the Viet Cong or to pressures for the US to press the war against the North or even against Communist China.

22. Politically, there have been surface indications of improvement in Saigon, primarily because of a temporary power accommodation among the military and the absence of Buddhist agitation against the Quat government. Reporting, however, continues to reflect suspicions and rivalries among top generals, rendered more serious because these divisions are influenced by current Catholic distrust of Quat and of the Buddhists, and by a degree of "wait-and-seeism" on the part of the Buddhists themselves. (MAP)

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